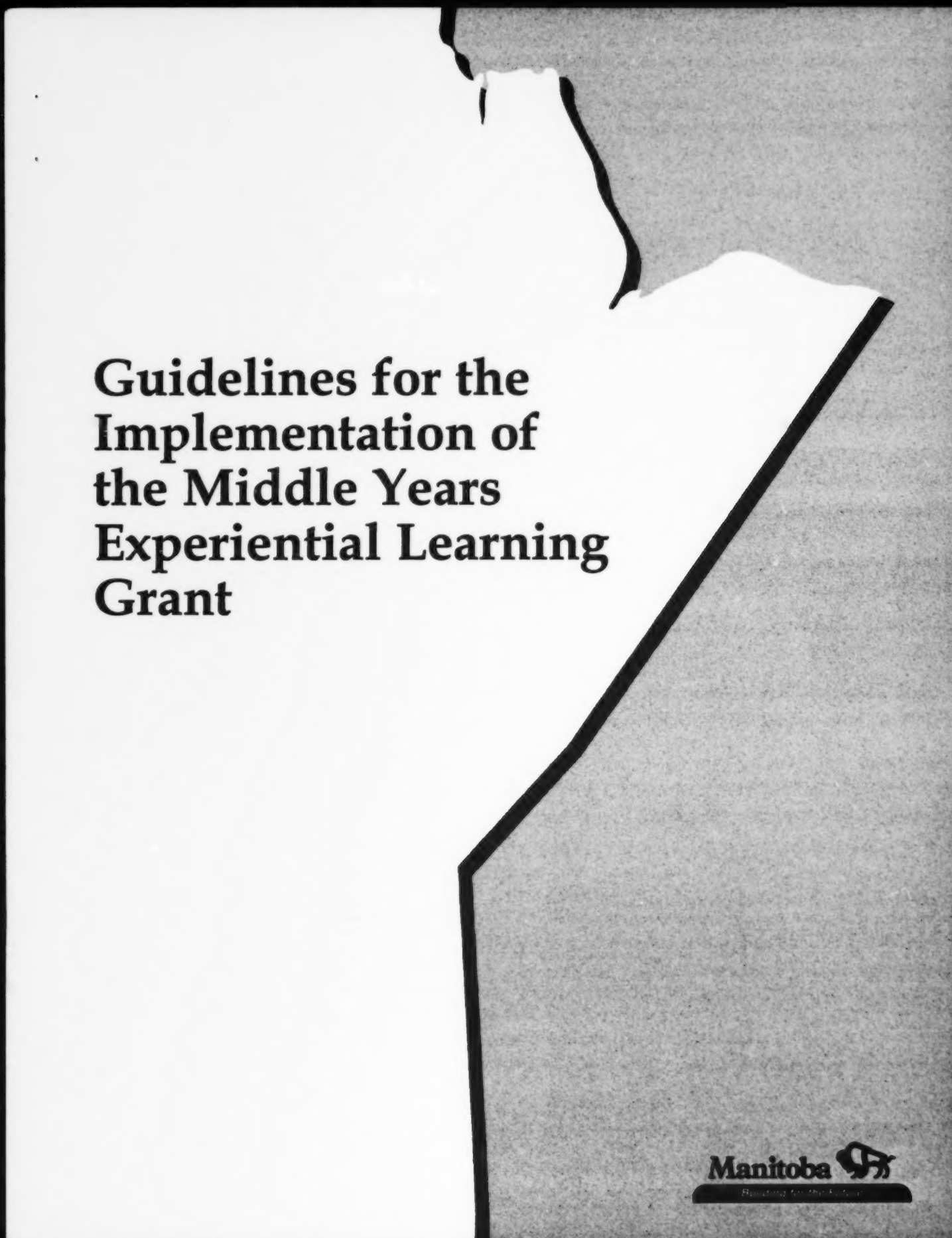
Guidelines for the Implementation of the Middle Years Experiential Learning Grant



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GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MIDDLE YEARS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING GRANT

2006

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth

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Introduction

Background

Addressing the needs of middle years students — including significant numbers of students identified as at risk in our system — is of critical importance if these young adolescents in Grades 5 to 8 are to expand and consolidate their academic skills and knowledge, engage fully with school, develop positive attitudes and behaviours, and make a successful transition to high school. Educators and researchers have articulated a vision for middle years education that recognizes the unique characteristics of these learners, and looks at the effective practices teachers use to support students with their learning. The Middle Years Experiential Learning (MYEL) grant is intended provide additional support for existing programming and act as a catalyst for new initiatives directed to "hands-on" learning.

Definition

Experiential learning is a learning process that actively engages students in an authentic experience allowing them to make their own discoveries and experiment with knowledge. Students also reflect on their experiences, thus developing new skills, new attitudes, and new theories or ways of thinking (Kraft & Sakofs, 1988[1]). To facilitate experiential learning, teachers plan activities that allow students to be curious, pose questions, investigate, experiment, solve problems, assume responsibility, and construct their own meaning. Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, and/or physically. The results of the learning are personal and form the bases for further experience and learning.[2]

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[1] Kraft, D., & Sakofs, M. (Eds.). (1988). The theory of experiential education. Boulder, CO: Association for Experiential Education.

[2] From Association for Experiential Education (www.aee.org).

Rationale

The middle years is the stage of development between the ages of 10 and 14 when students move into adolescence. The most crucial decisions in middle years education have to do with meeting the needs of this diverse group and must reflect the characteristics and needs of these rapidly changing young people. It is not only how the schools are organized that is important; it is programming that reflects their complex educational, social, physical, emotional, and ethical development that will make the difference.

Characteristics of Middle Years Learners

Middle years learners have unique physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs. A few of the characteristics of middle years learners that require special consideration in planning for their education are:

- They are constantly seeking personal validation through relationships with peers and adults.
- They are experiencing the onset of puberty and developing their sexual identity.
- They are searching for greater autonomy and independence.
- They are developing a sense of identity, personal and social values, and a sense of justice, equity and fairness.
- They require concrete, experiential learning: they prefer active versus passive learning.
- They need to see the relevance of learning not just for themselves but also in the larger context of the real world.
- They require experiences that help them uncover their personal abilities and interests.
- They are influenced by media, popular culture and adult values and need support in learning to make decisions and choices that are in their own best interest.

Engaging Students through Experiential Learning

We know that we can foster student engagement with school, independence and academic, social, emotional and physical development when we pay particular attention to how we program for middle years learners.

Assessment

One significant factor that can make a difference in student engagement is assessment and how it is experienced day to day by middle years learners. Both the *Middle Years Assessment Policy* and the recently released document *Rethinking Assessment with Purpose in Mind* describe how rethinking the way we assess learners can significantly increase engagement and academic progress, especially for struggling learners.

Assessment (assessment *for* and *as* learning) practices that increase engagement and achievement occur when:

- Students are actively involved in assessment (tracking their progress, goal setting, communicating their learning)
- Teachers monitor student progress and adjust instruction during the learning
- Teachers increase the role that descriptive feedback plays in day to day instruction
- There are clear targets that everyone can understand and articulate (exemplars, criteria for quality)

Learning Climate

Another significant factor for middle years learning that increases engagement and achievement is the type of experiences teachers provide for students during their learning. Some features of programming that increase engagement and achievement in the middle years are:

- Active versus passive student involvement — both physical and cognitive
- Relevance (to students and in the real world) of learning goals is made clear
- Opportunities to engage in work that involves real world issues
- Capitalizing on middle years students' interest in fairness
- Opportunities to make authentic contributions (feel important, make a difference) to their classroom, school, and larger community.
- Honouring the diversity of learners — provide experiences that address the needs of all learners no matter where they fall on the spectrums of learning styles, developmental stage, prior academic success, gender, culture, etc.

Examples of Experiential Learning

The following examples from middle years curricula illustrate experiential learning activities. In the future, we hope to gather other examples from classrooms across the province.

Grades 5 or 6 — Social Studies

Prepare with the students a short questionnaire for them to use at home, at school or in their neighbourhood to identify the most important social inequalities in their community. Pool the questionnaire results and initiate a discussion by encouraging the students to explore the possible causes of the inequalities identified and propose solutions for them. Have the class organize a community activity to address the social inequality deemed to be most important, such as fundraising for a charity, volunteer work for a soup kitchen, delivering promotional material for a charity, or a campaign to raise community awareness of the issue.

Grades 5 or 6 — Social Studies

Ask student dyads to read a newspaper article about current international events. Using an analysis sheet handout, get the dyads to analyse their article by identifying the topic and the main points and summarising the article in a few sentences. Have the groups briefly explain to the whole classroom the nature of their article and propose one way in which Canada might possibly be contributing to the situation it describes. Ask the groups of students to write a letter to the federal minister responsible asking him/her to describe the nature of Canada's involvement in the situation explained in their article. Specify that the students' letter is to include three questions designed to help clarify Canada's present or future role.

Grades 7/8 — ELA

Students use an inquiry approach to build an awareness of the influence and impact media has on their thinking, decision-making and cultural image.

This could include creating a display of media images, viewing of and responding to collected advertisements, exploring icons, investigating an audience's response to media through surveys or interviews, examining political speeches and gaining insights from speech writers, participating in a walk around the community to highlight examples of media around us, planning and launching a marketing campaign...

Grade 8 Art

Give students the challenge of symbolically portraying a person of their choice as a clay vessel — the vessel, in turn, might be an eventual gift to the person portrayed. Students individually brainstorm a list of individuals who matter to them in their lives — the list may include family members, friends, teachers, coaches, etc. For each name, they generate further ideas — attributes, possible symbols, colours, textures, patterns and shapes that suggest qualities of the person in question. Students also view and discuss various cultural and historical vessels in terms of "personality" as a way of building their vocabulary of possibilities. Finally, they narrow their choice to one person from the list and begin to sketch possible designs for their vessel. The challenge is to convey ideas and qualities of the person without actually showing anything of their actual appearance. Students build and fire their clay sculptures and then choose from possible finishing techniques (glaze, paint, stains, drawing media, etc.), with the challenge that all media decisions continue to be based on ideas about the person being portrayed. Finished pieces are shared and displayed in ways that invite thoughtful responses from viewers as to the person each vessel might represent and the ideas and qualities each embodies.

Middle Years Drama

Students, in groups, plan and develop a drama to describe the unfolding of an event/issue/story from the past or present. The following is an example of how students use a creative process to develop their own ideas.

Students will:

- choose an appropriate dramatic form (tableau, reader's theatre, pantomime, improvisation etc.)
- work collectively to creatively solve dramatic problems in the creation process
- find imaginative ways to give meaning by using props, setting and costumes
- explore and create characters by paying attention to dramatic techniques such as language, body, voice, gesture and movement, where appropriate
- reflect, discuss and make changes where necessary
- use a journal to document, reflect, analyze and evaluate the development of the group work and individual learning
- present their work to another group, receive feedback and make refinements
- share their creation with another audience

Grade 7 Science

Students establish a study site in a local area (e.g., park, natural area, vacant lot). Students practice their skills with scientific tools and procedures by gathering baseline data about the ecosystem/study area. This information is analyzed and recorded in a format that allows the measurements to be repeated every year. If classes collect the data year after year, students are able to analyze changes in the study area and try to determine what the major influences causing these changes might be. The causes may be related to human activity or to natural processes, such as succession. Students would also develop a strategy to either maintain or improve upon the health of the ecosystem they are monitoring. Once example would be for students to help construct paths in the area to decrease the damage done by people travelling through the area.

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The Middle Years Experiential Learning Grant is intended to strengthen students' connections to school through experiential learning opportunities that help them apply learning to daily life.

Eligible Expenditures

For 2006/2007, the MYEL grant is calculated at $10 per eligible pupil in Grades 5 to 8 at September 30, 2006. Funds can be used for new and existing initiatives that support the objectives of the grant, including:

- Teacher professional learning related to students' academic engagement and experiential learning
- Student and teacher resources that support students' academic engagement and experiential learning
- Learning activities, within the school and community, that help students see connections between learning and every day life
- Other possibilities that align with the intention of the MYEL Grant

Note that transportation costs for field trips or purchase of computer hardware and software will not qualify for funding under the MYEL grant.

Reporting Requirements/Program Contacts

To provide the Department with an indication of the new and/or ongoing middle years programming for which the grant funds will be used, school divisions are requested to provide, by **May 15, 2006**, a description of how they plan to use the grant in 2006-2007.

Requirements related to reporting on the use and the impacts of grants are under review as part of a broader discussion on accountability and information sharing.

Please mail, fax or email this information to:

English Program

Cindy Tinsley, Consultant, Instruction, Curriculum and Assessment Branch (telephone: 945-5886; fax: 948-2442; email: ctinsley@gov.mb.ca).

Français and French Immersion Programs

Gilbert Michaud, Consultant, Bureau de l'éducation française Division (telephone: 945-6927; fax 945-1625; email: gimichaud@gov.mb.ca).

These guidelines are available at: <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/cur/>. For additional programming information, please contact the consultants identified above.

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On-Line Teaching Strategies

Instructional Strategies: Experiential Learning

A website from Saskatchewan Learning that includes links and a unit description, "Engagement in the Middle Years".

<http://www.saskschools.ca/curr_content/onlineteach/op/resources/resources_experiential.htm>

Association for Experiential Education <www.aee.org>.

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